

Social Media Marketing of “Sports Fan Economy”

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Abstract. In the era with overall access to the Internet, the social media has provided sound conditions for marketing and development of sports fan economy. This paper summarizes the concept of sports fan economy, discusses the features of sports fan-related social media and demonstrates main marketing models and strategies of the sports fan economy. The paper also proposes a few possible marketing strategies based on sports fans’ consumption behaviors.

Keywords: Social media; Sports marketing strategy; Fan economy.

1. Introduction of the “sports fan economy” in the era of social media

1.1 Introduction

Sports celebrities have emerged as a new force, setting off round after round of capital frenzy in the entertainment industry.

Fans use social media to participate in activities, promoting the development of the entertainment industry and expanding the scale of the “fan economy” [1]. This situation has spread beyond the entertainment industry to all industries, and the sports field has naturally become one of them.

In 2016, the Rio Olympic Games made Fu Yuanhui a “Internet celebrity” with a soaring number of micro blog fans and over ten million live fans; Fans of Zhang Jike, the table tennis star in China, celebrated the star’s birthday by advertising and lighting up the “Water Cube” [2]. In the era of fan economy, this is a very normal phenomenon. When the media encounters the impact of the Internet and new media, it is accompanied by “attention economy”. When mobile internet and social network have become popular, social media marketing of sports “fan economy” has begun to rise.

In the era of social media, sports fans can interact in online forums, launch sports star club microblogs, etc., and support sports stars, forming a greater economic impetus. “sports fan economy” has become a very popular consumption mode in the field of sports nowadays. Under the new media mode, the emergence of “Internet plus” and sharing concept has made “experiential, interactive and innovative” the keywords of sports marketing³. Some scholars believe that fan economy is a type of emotional capital with emotions of fans as the core and fan community as the marketing means, which is mainly consumer-oriented and dominated by its marketing means. Based on the emotional perspective, it can realize the purpose of appreciation capital for brands and idols” [4]. Therefore, “sports fan economy” can be seen as a social capital platform and trade marketing behavior based on the participation and trust of sports fans as a sports brand community.

The sports fan economy can be summarized as follows: a sports economic form in which the communicators use the latest communication technologies to enable sports fans to have the impulse to consume emotional capital under the unreal conditions of the media, and at the same time implement emotional imitation behavior. This mode is based on the fact that sports fans pay attention to a certain type of sports goods or a group of sports idols. The products they pay attention to often exceed the characteristics of similar products, and the people they pay attention to have certain advantages.

In today's society, sports consumption has become a hot topic. To some extent, the symbolic value of commodities is rapidly increasing, even much higher than their own value. The symbolic value consumption behavior among them has promoted the rapid development of fan culture, and has slowly penetrated into sports manufacturing, sports fitness, sports competition performance and other consumption fields in the sports industry [5].

1.2 Analysis of sports fans

Sports fans in the era of social media are characterized by strong interaction, multiple autonomy and high loyalty.

Strong interaction.

Autonomy of consumers.

Social media and mass platforms have changed the passive situation of the audience in terms of communication methods.

High loyalty.

In the era of social media, the higher the loyalty of sports fans, the greater the sports brand value. The more loyalty that sports fans possess of certain sports commodities or sports stars, the more their trust and persistence of the concerned products. Many businesses and industries have begun to cultivate the loyalty of users, taking improving the loyalty of users as the main task of brand operation.

The characteristics of "sports fan economy" in the era of social media are mainly shown in:

Upgrading of sports consumption mode.

Extension of sports brand value.

"Online to offline" e-commerce sports marketing mode.

2. Fan economy marketing strategies based on social media

2.1 "Sports fan economy" marketing modes based on market operation

The proportion of "sports fan economy" in the sports culture industry has gradually increased, and a very representative economic model has emerged.

2.1.1 The mode of sports idols: star economy

This model is typical of "sports fan economy" in the previous media period. From the perspective of economic goals, sports consumers (fans) are the main body. On top of their consumption behavior, which is uncontrollable by the seller, they enjoy the scene of sports stars and experience accelerated stimulation of products to form emotional consumption [6].

2.1.2 Sports media text-based IP operation

There are many forms of sports media text, such as sports newspapers and sports stories, which can be classified as sports text. The key is whether the sports text is "attractive". With the rapid development of media integration, sports media texts have integrated mass culture and various elements. "sports fan economy" is transitioning from traditional mode to IP development and cross-border integration of resource operation mode. Therefore, according to the main body of the media, "sports fan economy" is a three-dimensional model from "text production consumption" to "IP development operation" [6].

2.1.3 Business model of sports community

In the current media communication, a sports community economic model has been established to carry out resource combination and integration with the sports fans' community as the unit. In the "sports fan economy", to use the consumer power and multiple resources gathered by cooperation, so as to create a sports culture industry chain.

2.2 Sports marketing strategy based on new media

Based on the analysis of the demand of "fans" and the marketing model, we should pay attention to the interaction of "new media" and adjust the sports marketing strategy accordingly.

2.2.1 Socialized marketing

The use of social media, such as microblogging, WeChat, forums and other networks in direct and interesting forms of marketing, such as pictures, text, videos, etc., are widely distributed on social platforms [7].

Social marketing can use new media technology to carry out the whole process of sports marketing. Its content must be realized through integration, mainly from the tracking and analysis of sports fans big data. Sports fan economy makes use of community thinking, which is the centralized management and guidance of sports consumer groups. Social media have given full play to the functions of sports VIP members, sports fans and other product marketing means to realize its value conversion and social support.

2.2.2 “Pan media” marketing

Pan media marketing is a form used as media to spread information. There are new media of different types and forms, and the speed of change is dazzling. In the process of interaction with them, sports fan economy pays special attention to the timely spread and marketing of their “word of mouth”. With the increasing variety of social software, the function coverage is more and more comprehensive, and any media can play a role as a tool. In the era of media diversification, the path of pan media marketing is worth exploring. We could carry out multi-channel sports brand strategy to strive for long-term benefits of sports fans.

2.2.3 “We media” marketing

People use the carrier of digital technology platform to publish and share information, and “we media” such as forums, blogs, microblogs, WeChat moments and live broadcast platforms have emerged, which are characterized by low threshold, easy to master, and good results in gaining attention.

For example, in the era of social media, the need to focus on sports and fitness knowledge has led to a high number of posts concerning sports being forwarded on our media⁸. The sports information related to this not only completed a large number of forwarding very quickly, but also completed the secondary dissemination of sports information in order to facilitate search and collection. Therefore, timely integration of sports brand product information into relevant information can play a leading or exemplary role.

2.3 Sports Marketing Suggestions Based on the Analysis of Fans' Consumption Behavior

In fact, the consumption behavior of sports fans is not as excessive and irrational as we think, but controlled. Sports fans demonstrate a symbolic consumption when consuming idol products, which has certain cultural significance. When a sports fan gradually develops into an individual in the sociological sense, he or she has the knowledge and strength of active consumption, as well as social significance and cultural value⁹. It is of great theoretical value and practical significance for all aspects of social construction to guide the consumption behavior of sports fans and make the sports “fans economy” operate well and develop positively [10].

2.3.1 Sports fans as the main body

The first premise of sports fans as the main body of marketing is that sports enterprises and industries fully recognize the status of sports fans. Thus, fans' consumption need should be the priority. For example, the sales of the products (jerseys, shoes, souvenirs, etc.) of the American Professional Basketball League teams. We should also focus on the designing and manufacturing of sports fans products.

2.3.2 Building network platform for sports fans

Building a sports fan community integrating virtual world and reality can help increase “emotional capital” of the fans.

In the era of the Internet, sports fans like to share new ideas, new measures and seek consensus [11]. By building a network platform and using the marketing means of emotional interaction with sports fans, one can increase the sports brand recognition and conversion rate from fans to profits. For example, the establishment of micro blog for football club fans makes fan more loyal and gather them together; It is also easier to manage and can form a healthy intimate interaction relationship;

We should also pay attention to providing official star-related products, restricting the purchase of non-registered fans, and protect their copyright.

2.3.3 Carrying out cultural activities for sports fans

Activities with fan-related themes, promoted by sports brands, and public welfare activities, supported by stars, can enable sports fans to actively participate in brand culture experience, promote further mutual relations, and come up with common topics and seek resonance with others. In the implementation, we should work with the main members to give play to their strength and promote sports brands to win fans.

2.3.4 Advertising endorsement of sports stars

We should attach importance to the position of brand personality in marketing, and we can adopt the consumption mode through the influence of the attention capital and personality mode of star spokesmen on fans. Taking table tennis rackets as an example” the sales volume of the series of rackets endorsed by Ma Long reached the top of the brand series of Hongshuangxi.

3. Conclusion

Sports fans community is the base of consumer activities, and their act of consumption is due to their desire to express themselves. Sports fans actively use the media, actively look for idols, experience the happiness of constructing their self-image and expressing themselves, and become the most discerning and picky sports consumers.

Under the influence of new media and Internet technology, sports fan economy has gradually developed its unique style and created a series of economic benefits.

Social media is not only a platform to spread sports information, but also a place to gather strength. It makes the distance between sports stars and fans gradually closer, the interaction more direct and frequent, and the emotion is also deepening. It is essential to promote the consumption experience and lifestyle of sports fans both online and offline to form multifaceted interaction. Therefore, grasping and analyzing the characteristics of fans and fan economy in the social media era can better develop the fan economy. With the continuous development of Internet platforms, it is an inevitable choice to have new media become the marketing strategy of sports fan economy. While continuously developing the sports fan economy mode of market operation, it is necessary to strengthen the exploration of sports marketing means based on the analysis of new media sports marketing strategies and sports fans' consumption behavior, in order to achieve the steady development of sports fan economy.

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